

Amendments to the Claims:

The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Currently Amended) A spread illuminating apparatus comprising:

at least one light source;

a light conductive plate which allows light emitted from the at least one light source and introduced thereinto to exit out from at least one of two major surfaces thereof respectively toward at least one object to be illuminated; and

a light converging means, which is disposed between the at least one light source and the light conductive plate, has a refractive index profile in a direction orthogonal to the two major surfaces of the light conductive plate;

wherein the refractive index profile of the light converging means is structured symmetric about a center plane of the light converging means such that a refractive index decreases with an increase in distance from the center plane.

2. (Canceled)

3. (Currently Amended) A spread illuminating apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein the light converging means has a height substantially equal to a thickness of the light conductive plate toward the one end surface.

4. (Previously Presented) A spread illuminating apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein the light converging means has its light entrance surface and its light exit surface oriented parallel to each other.

5-6. (Canceled)

7. (Currently Amended) A spread illuminating apparatus according to Claim 6 Claim 12, wherein the plurality of the transparent films of the light converging means are provided in an odd number.

8. (Currently Amended) A spread illuminating apparatus according to ~~Claim 6~~ Claim 12, wherein each of the adhesive layers adhesive layer of the light converging means has a refractive index at least equal to a refractive index of one of the two adjacent transparent films having a smaller refractive index, and has a refractive index at most equal to a refractive index of the other of the two adjacent transparent films having a larger refractive index.

9. (Currently Amended) A spread illuminating apparatus according to ~~Claim 6~~ Claim 12, wherein the plurality of transparent films are formed of resin.

10. (Currently Amended) A spread illuminating apparatus according to ~~Claim 6~~ Claim 12, wherein the plurality of transparent films are formed of glass.

11. (New) A spread illuminating apparatus comprising:

at least one light source;

a light conductive plate which allows light emitted from the at least one light source and introduced thereinto to exit out from at least one of two major surfaces thereof respectively toward at least one object to be illuminated; and

a light converging means, which is disposed between the at least one light source and the light conductive plate, has a refractive index profile in a direction orthogonal to the two major surfaces of the light conductive plate;

wherein the light converging means has a light entrance surface and a light exit surface bonded respectively to the at least one light source and one end surface of the light conductive plate by means of an adhesive that transmits the light emitted from the at least one light source.

12. (New) A spread illuminating apparatus comprising:
 - at least one light source;
 - a light conductive plate which allows light emitted from the at least one light source and introduced thereinto to exit out from at least one of two major surfaces thereof respectively toward at least one object to be illuminated; and
 - a light converging means, which is disposed between the at least one light source and the light conductive plate, has a refractive index profile in a direction orthogonal to the two major surfaces of the light conductive plate;
 - wherein the light converging means comprises a plurality of transparent films that have respective refractive indexes and which are layered over one another, and a plurality of light-transmittable adhesive layers each of which is sandwiched between two adjacent transparent films.